FACTSHEET

Veterinary Services

United States Department of Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

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Realizing the Future Through Regionalization

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is proposing to adopt risk-based regional import requirements in accordance with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the Uruguay Round Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures. It is hoped that these efforts will open new world markets to U.S. agricultural industries and allow foreign farmers, who previously could not, to sell their livestock and products to American consumers.

Out With the Old

Under the 1930 Tariff Act, countries affected by certain animal diseases, such as foot-and-mouth disease or African swine fever, were banned from exporting animals or animal products to the United States. This policy was absolute. Either the exporting country had the disease or it did not. There was no in-between status that recognized disease-free regions within a country. This situation would be comparable to the European Union (EU) banning all cattle coming in from the United States because of a disease that existed only in one State. Herds in every other State would be unaffected by the disease, but all 50 States would still be banned from exporting cattle to the EU.

Scientists now believe that in many situations such imports can be carried out with insignificant risk of introducing disease agents into the United States.

In With the New

Recently, APHIS took the initiative and proposed changing the regulations regarding the importation of swine and ruminants (cattle, sheep, goats, deer, etc.). The proposed regulations center around two key points: regionalization and expanded risk assessment and classification.

The concept of regionalization is founded on the longstanding idea that import requirements should be based on geography and science rather than politics. The political borders between nations or among states within a country are invisible; geographic boundaries, such as mountains and rivers, are not. Diseases must be able to travel in order to spread. If the path is blocked by a river flowing down the middle of a country, then the disease is naturally confined to one side of that country. Also, man-made borders that are well patrolled and protected can limit the spread of disease when affected livestock is turned back.

Sometimes, one section of a country is more advanced than others. The advanced section might have a stronger animal health program that allows for the production of disease-free livestock and products. Advanced, well protected, and geographically isolated areas will become recognized low-risk regions. The risk classification for areas within a country will differ according to the risks involved.

Risk assessment consists of identifying risk factors and evaluating their seriousness. Under the new regulations, the risk levels have been expanded. Before, with regard to a particular disease, classification was either "free" or "not free." Now, instead of just two, the rules allow for six levels of risk.

The criteria for the new levels are

- The presence of restricted disease agents in the region;
- The presence of restricted disease agents in adjacent regions;
- The presence of active control programs for the restricted disease agent in the region;
- The practice of vaccination against restricted disease agents in the region;
- The presence of natural or man-made barriers that separate the region from adjacent areas;
- The level of border control maintained by the region;
- The nature of import regulations implemented by the region;
- The level of animal disease surveillance maintained by the region; and

- The animal health infrastructure of the government proposing exportations from the region into the United States.

These factors are all examined when assigning a risk classification to a region. However, a region doesn't receive just one classification. A region can receive a classification for each species of animal and each type of disease.

The Risk Classifications

An individual region can be assigned any one of six levels of risk:

Risk Class RN (Negligible Risk)
—Region is physically isolated with strict border controls;
—Region is not adjacent to an area with restricted agents (pests or diseases);
—Region has a sound animal health infrastructure with no cases of restricted-agent diagnosis during the lifetime of any living animals or susceptible species; and
—Vaccinations against the restricted agent are not practiced in the region.

Risk Class R1 (Slight Risk)
—Region is separated from areas with a higher risk classification by natural or man-made barriers and must maintain strict border controls;
—Region can be adjacent to and may trade with higher risk areas; and
—Region has no cases of restricted-agent diagnosis within 5 years (10 years for some spongiform encephalopathies).

Risk Class R2 (Low Risk)
—Region has no cases of restricted-agent diagnosis for 1 year (5 years for some spongiform encephalopathies) and surveillance data indicate herd incidence of less than 0.1 percent during the past 5 years;
—Region can be adjacent to and may trade with infected areas; and
—Vaccinations against the restricted agent may be used only on herds with the highest risk of exposure.

Risk Class R3 (Moderate Risk)
—Region maintains strict border control and is known to be infected with restricted agents.

Risk Class R4 (High Risk)
—Region is currently known to be affected by restricted agents;
—Vaccination for restricted agents is frequent and widespread; and
—Region may or may not conduct surveillance or control programs.

Risk Class RU (Unknown Risk)
—Region does not meet requirements of other risk classes, has not applied for a classification, or does not have an animal health infrastructure that would allow for classification.

Opportunities

The job of APHIS is to make sure all imported animals and animal products are safe for America's dinner table. APHIS believes the new regulations pose no increased risk to the health of U.S. livestock. By the time imported animals pass inspections in the originating country and in the United States and, if necessary, pass quarantine, their risk should be the same as animals coming from an RN region.

APHIS views these new regulations as an opportunity to scientifically strengthen our domestic defenses regarding foreign diseases. In addition, in accordance with international trade agreements, the new regulations will encourage other countries to view the United States in a regionalized way, opening the doors for our exports to foreign markets around the world.

Additional Information

For more information regarding the new regulations or the import and export of animals write

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